

Fun Facts About Recycling for Kids

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Think of all the trash your family takes out every week. It adds up. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA,) without recycling, a family of four throws away about 2,000 pounds of garbage each year.

Businesses, factories, restaurants and schools also have lots of trash. Most cities and counties have dump sites where the garbage goes. Some of it is burned, some of it is buried. Every year, the garbage humans create gets larger.

But there's a way to change that through recycling--reusing or making new things from garbage.

1. Recycle this

Metal food and drink cans are usually made of aluminum or steel. In the United States, 60 percent of aluminum drink cans are recycled. Put a magnet on the side of a can. If it falls off, the can is aluminum.

Glass can be melted down to make new glass. Recycling centers must sort glass by color.

Paper is made from wood pulp, which is made from crushing trees. We can save trees by recycling our waste paper because it can be mixed with water and broken down by machine into pulp. The pulp can be used to make cardboard or recycled paper. Americans use more than 580 pounds of paper per person every year.

Plastics are an important part of our lives. We use plastics to make things such as drink containers, household items such as combs and brushes or computers and furniture. Natural gas and oil (the same oil used to make gasoline) are used to make plastic.

Plant waste--grass cuttings, potato, orange and banana peels, leftovers from salads and natural foods combined--can fill a garbage can quickly. This kind of garbage can easily be used to make compost, which can then be used to fertilize plants and gardens. Vegetables and other plants completely break down and make food for plants.

2. Reuse

Learning to reuse things that are still in good shape can save our environment. Reusing things creates less air and water pollution than making a new item or even recycling.

In France, most grocery stores sell drinks in glass bottles that can be returned for refilling.

Plastic bags cut into thin strips and tied together can be reused to knit or crochet bags, purses and clothes.

Buying used clothing at a consignment or thrift stores helps save energy because it extends the life of a garment.

3. Reduce

With a little effort, we can reduce the amount of garbage we create.

According to the EPA, Americans workers throw away enough paper every year to build a 12-foot high wall from San Francisco to New York.

Because school children started a campaign to ban throw-away chopsticks, about 100 restaurants in Beijing have promised to wash and reuse the eating utensils, according to a story in the Washington Post.

4. Recycling effects and rewards

Making products using recycled goods saves energy and money.

Recycling one aluminum can saves energy--enough that you can run a TV for three hours or a 100-watt light bulb for four hours.

Steel cans are used to package more than 1,500 different kinds of food, according to the Steel Recycling Institute.

Glass never wears out. It can be recycled forever.

5. Do your part

You can earn money by saving and crushing aluminum cans that scrap companies will buy.

Help save the Earth. Use cloth dish towels instead of paper towels, and limit the use of paper plates and plastic utensils.

Make a survey of how many cans of soft drinks or bottles of water your friends in your class at school drink each week. How many of them throw the cans and bottles away? How many recycle? Use the information to create a poster to show your class. Encourage them to recycle.

6. Toxic waste

Paint, oil and batteries are examples of toxic waste that can hurt the environment if thrown into the city landfill site.

Most cities have guidelines for disposing of hazardous waste. Ask your parents to check where to deposit batteries or other toxic waste.

Use rechargeable batteries and a charger instead of disposable batteries for your electronics.